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Corporate Personailities

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Corporate Personalities



Beth Bailey McLean
Director of Home Economics
Swift and Company

Betty Crocker and Ann Pillsbury may be only trade names to you, but they all have real people behind them. Each year these names increase sales and good will for the companies. Someday you may be working as a corporate personality.

"A WOMAN has the final word at Swift." That was the gist of a recent Swift & Company advertisement, and the woman referred to was the company's extensively promoted, corporate personality, Martha Logan. The advertising claim is far from being an empty phrase; it is true in many respects, and indicates the growing importance of corporate personalities to companies of all kinds.

The purposes and advantages of such company personalities are manifold. They make friends for the company and definitely influence people to buy the company's products. They give a company a human touch and frequently an authority that it could get in no other way. For instance: homemakers are usually skeptical about trying recipes they do not feel have been tested and approved by another woman. Time and again companies find that the mere inclusion of a feminine personality's picture and name in recipes on packages or in advertising increases readership and response tremendously.

But the values of corporate personalities are by no means limited to food companies. Electrical appliance manufacturers find them valuable in demonstrating and giving homemakers advice on the use of their products; carpet and furniture manufacturers find them useful as interior decoration experts; cosmetic manufacturers use them successfully as skin, hair, and makeup experts.

Betty Crocker

Possibly the most famous of all corporate personalities, the purely fictitious Betty Crocker of General Mills, was created in 1921 to solve an immediate problem: to answer mail from entrants in a recipe contest run by Washburn Crosby Company (chief predecessor of General Mills). Her male creators realized that women would object to having men mixed up in a recipe contest, picked the "Crocker" from a General Mills vice-president and the "Betty"

just because it sounded good. Certainly General Mills never dreamed that the name would develop into one of its most important assets. Yet, today, she is used in the bulk of General Mills huge advertising and promotion campaigns; she is listed on the books as a \$1 asset, but vice-president in charge of advertising, Sam Gale, admits her value is vast. A survey made by the company about 3 years ago showed General Mills that its offspring is as famous as a movie star; 91 percent of American housewives knew Betty Crocker and 56 percent knew she was a member of the General Mills family. Her name is jealously guarded by General Mills' legal department, and her reputation is equally well guarded by the advertising department. Because of the company's extensive promotion of Betty, and because it further strengthened her trade mark by naming some of its products "Betty Crocker," the General Mills legal staff now believes no other Betty Crocker—even a person born and baptized under that name—can encroach on Betty's reputation. Copywriters who put words in Betty's mouth are guided by a "Betty Crocker Policy," which was drawn up some years ago by the General Mills advertising and legal departments. Such a policy is almost mandatory because the company must constantly protect Betty's enviable reputation with American housewives. She must be dignified and friendly, but never intimate. She must always be a gentlewoman. She must be used only to discuss home economics, and must never be allowed to talk about her supposedly private life. The same picture of Betty must always be used—a picture drawn in 1936 by Newsa McMein to supplant the several confusingly different pictures then used.

By keeping Betty a figure of high character in every respect, General Mills, of course, not only builds her up in the eyes of consumers, but also protects itself from the remote possibility of any legal suits by anyone claiming the Betty Crocker promotion

has subjected her to ridicule. Also, because it "might be illegal" to represent Betty as a one-woman encyclopedia of recipes, etc., Betty Crocker copy must always say "we" wherever possible instead of "I," and, further, the Policy stipulates that "anything said by Betty or credited to her must be literally true with respect to some current member of the company's home economics staff."

While General Mills created Betty Crocker on the spur of the moment, the problem of creating a corporate personality today is not quite so simple. No one actually knows, for example, just how many such personalities are now in use, and there is the danger of picking a name that is already copyrighted and used—perhaps only regionally. For this and other reasons many companies use the name of someone in the organization. That too, however, has serious drawbacks.

H. J. Heinz Company, for instance, spent many years and a good deal of money promoting its home economist, Josephine Gibson, only to have her resign in 1936. Heinz made no effort to protect its use of her name, so now Miss Gibson capitalizes on her following as food editor of the *Pittsburgh Press*.

Heinz officials insist they feel no resentment, but they say they will never again use a personality as Miss Gibson was used, that they prefer to emphasize the trade mark "57" and, should they ever find a name essential for consumer advertising, they will probably choose Mrs. H. J. Heinz.

In many instances, using a name for a corporate personality which also embodies the company name is perfectly feasible and desirable. Just as the name Mrs. H. J. Heinz is credible, so is the name Ann Pillsbury, of Pillsbury Mills, Inc., created in 1944 specifically to author an anniversary cookbook. Later the name was used to sign consumer correspondence, and, in true corporate personality fashion, consumer mail has since then increased 422 percent. Her name and "personality" are now being used in consumer advertising, and will be built up according to specific rules laid down by board member, Alfred Pillsbury: "She must be sweet but strong, able to teach but not didactic, kind and motherly, and be between 36 and 40 years old."

Mary Alden

It would certainly seem wise for any company contemplating a corporate personality to follow Pillsbury's example and establish definite rules and objectives right from the start. It would also seem wise, right from the beginning to settle on an artist's conception, rather than on a photograph of some person in the company. The experience of the Quaker Oats Company (Chicago) is a good example. For years it has used a fictitious corporate personality named Mary Alden with an actual photograph of whom-ever happened to be Quaker's head home economist at the time. A picture of Mary Lowell Schwinn, head of that company's home economics department until early in 1947, was used for years. Then Reidum Kobler took over, and her picture is now being used. Miss Kobler has signed an agreement allowing Quaker to take pictures of her "any kind at any time" and, presumably, these pictures may be used even if she should leave the company.

Up to now Quaker has used Mary Alden primarily in promotion to the trade. However, she has appeared on Quaker's corn meal and flour packages with an

invitation to write for recipes, and as a result inquiries have increased tremendously. Therefore, Quaker is anxious to have Mary Alden play a bigger role, will undoubtedly sooner or later give her a full-fledged build-up in a consumer advertising campaign.

When that happens, the company may have to follow the lead of many other food companies and use a stylized picture to depict Mary Alden on its packages and consumer advertisements. As Mary Alden is built up, the company wants to use more "Mary Aldens" in personal appearances, and it is obviously too difficult to round up sufficient people who bear any resemblance to an actual photograph.

Martha Logan

Swift & Company has also long used an actual photograph of its head home economist, Mrs. Beth Bailey McLean, to depict its corporate personality, Martha Logan. And, Swift, too, has found it more practical and far less confusing to have stylized drawing rather than an actual photograph. Therefore, two years ago the company began using an "imaginary" face.

Such a change was undoubtedly inevitable in a broad scale corporate personality operation such as Swift's has become. Although Mrs. McLean is the self-styled "Mama Martha Logan," there are actually 35 Martha Logans, some blonde, some brunette, and none of them looking like Mrs. McLean's photograph. It is still perfectly possible for a homemaker to meet two entirely different looking Martha Logans. Consequently the various Martha Logans are introduced under their own names as well as the corporate one, even though Swift's advertisements show Martha Logan as just one woman.

Undoubtedly, head home economist Beth Bailey McLean is the living personification of the advertised Martha. Like Martha, she is seemingly indefatigable and like Martha she is unquestionably "The First Lady at Swift & Company": The real reason Swift & Company can say that "A woman has the final word at Swift" is that Mrs. McLean has perhaps more authority than any other home economist in a similar position. Swift uses Mrs. McLean's home economics department as a major and authoritative part of consumer research, rather than as a deliberately intentional promotional device and it accepts the consumer opinion of the department to an extraordinary degree.

Mrs. Tucker

Interestingly enough, corporate personalities seem to work fully as well for small and/or regional companies as they do for big ones. Perhaps one of the best examples is Mrs. Tucker, a grandmotherly lady with glasses pushed up on her forehead, who has smiled on users of Mrs. Tucker's shortening for 35 years. Painted by an advertising artist for Mrs. Tucker's corporate parent, Interstate Cottonseed Oil and Refining Company (Sherman, Texas), she was created originally as a brand name to keep consumers from associating the company's shortening products with cottonseed oil. Today she is very much a corporate personality and in the minds of consumers she lives and breathes. She was recently assured by one correspondent that "My mother knew you when she lived in Sherman." Last year, the company

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recognized her popularity by changing its name to Mrs. Tucker's Foods, Inc.

The list of companies using corporate personalities includes such nationally known firms as Armour & Company, Durkee Famous Foods, Libby, McNeill & Libby, Kraft Foods, etc., as well as a host of regional companies. And the list is still growing.

Frances Barton

General Foods has also recently adopted a full-time corporate star, Frances Barton, for its big consumer service department. She was actually created in 1926 as Frances Lee Barton (the middle name was chosen when Swans Down flour was particularly popular in the South). As Frances Lee Barton she appeared in network radio and printed advertising and signed consumer service department mail. Then in 1932-35 she used the pleasing voice of Mrs. Isabella Beach to build *General Foods' Cooking School of the Air* to a peak of 250,000 listeners. General Foods dropped *Cooking School of the Air* when one of the company's autonomous divisions withdrew its support, and soon Frances was relegated to the special role of consumer correspondent.

Now revitalized and minus the "Lee," Frances Barton is playing an increasingly important part in General Foods corporate relations. She was revitalized for the same reason companies create corporate personalities in the first place; to perform multitudinous

functions which are difficult to handle in any other way.

It is extremely important that the representatives of corporate personalities be selected with the greatest possible care. Most companies might be inclined to concentrate primarily on finding attractive people with pleasing voices, in the right age bracket, and with the right educational background, and let it go at that. Any moral laxity on the part of its corporate representatives is a direct reflection on the company itself and an open invitation for any person who might bear the same name as the corporate character to bring suit. Obviously, care and a good deal of thought must go into the building of corporate personalities. But, when properly handled, they are definite assets—worth far more, tangibly and intangibly—than the time, trouble, and money it takes to set them up.

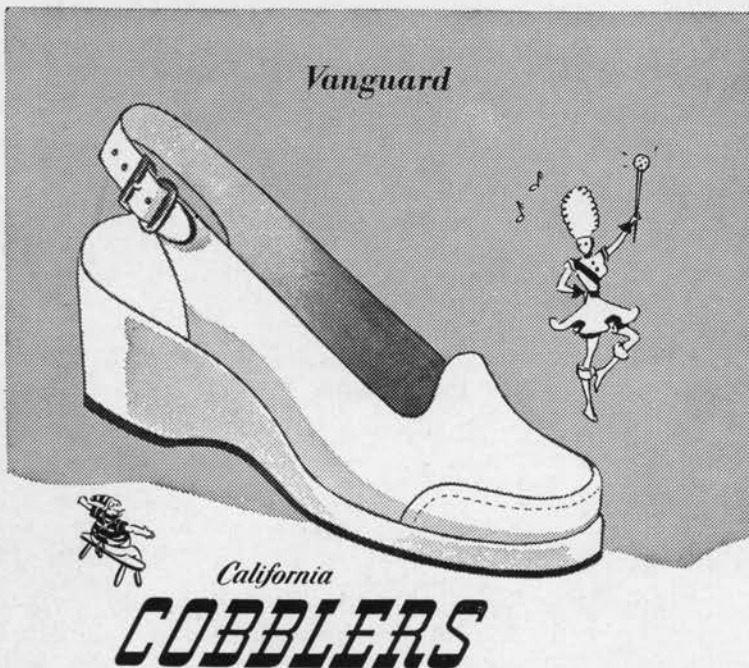
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